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THE PHYSIC OF OUR FATHERS.

Vita Medica; Chapters of Medical Life and Work. By Sir Benjamin Ward Richardson, M.D., LL.D., F.R.S. Pp. xvi + 496. (London: Longmans and Co, 1897.)

THIS work, Mr. Bertram Richardson tells us, was finished by his father on Wednesday, November 18, 1896, just before eight o'clock in the evening. At ten he was seized with the illness which ended fatally on Saturday morning, November 21. Thus a pathetic interest attaches to these last words of a singularly interesting and gifted man. Not a few errors in the text, such as the misspelling of proper names, and so forth, are due no doubt to the want of the author's revision.

The work may be roughly divided into the biographical part, and a second part in which the author, as if with a prescience of death, tells us of the ideas which had occupied his thoughts in his later years. We trust that we may be forgiven for saying that the former part is by far the more interesting. If Sir Benjamin's style occasionally offend the purist, he nevertheless writes in a vigorous, graphic, and even picturesque fashion, which is far better than mere purity. Although no one would have been more reluctant than the author himself to have his style compared to that of so splendid and accomplished a master of prose as Mr. Ruskin, yet we admit that on reading the first part of this book we were reminded of the charming "Praeterita," in its winning egotism without self-conceit, its happy delineation of character, and its broad humanity. We were greedy of more, and confess to a disappointment when other matters, which the author no doubt regarded as more important, cut short the personal narrative. Not only so, but the narrative itself is diversified by reflections always shrewd and kindly, often acute and original. The admirable portraits of those most interesting of men the old-fashioned country practitioners of medicine—such as Dudley Hudson and Willis—are excellent; in these pages the abler sort of country doctor, with his rugged kindliness, his curious stores of ill-digested learning, his flashes of humorous insight, his devotion to his calling, and his readiness of resource in emergencies, is described to the life. The modern practitioner, however, has some grasp of principles, whereas his predecessor, for the most part, hated ideas; if the modern doctor be inferior to his predecessor in mother wit, less curious in his mental furniture, and wanting in the vigorous eccentricity of manner and thought which made his predecessor entertaining as a character, yet his education in scientific methods makes him a far more enlightened practitioner of a very abstruse and complicated art. We insist on this distinction between the scientific physician and the merely practical doctor, because we think Sir Benjamin Richardson, in his advocacy of the old system of apprenticeship, which no doubt taught well the arts of managing men and horses and of smelling out drugs in the dark of the night, left out of view that cultivation in the broader principles of medicine as a science which nowadays mark the modern practitioner even in country places. For lack of a greater breadth of mental training the Dudley Hudsons, the Willises, and the rest, keenly as they loved curious detail, gained no wide reputation. Moreover, but few apprentices had remarkable men for their teachers; "first catch your despot." The men who stimulated and instructed the young Richardson were singularly able men; too many medical apprentices fell under the guidance of masters whose endowments, natural or acquired, were often little above those of the contemporary cow doctor.

Many points of more than local interest are touched upon in the course of the biographical sketch. Richardson emphasises the part taken by Perry of Glasgow in making known in Great Britain the distinction between enteric and typhoid fevers. Dr. A. P. Stewart, a pupil of Perry, helped to make popular the distinction so clearly taught by his master. The author also gives a very graphic account of the first operation under anæsthetics in Glasgow, by Andrew Buchanan.

Of that remarkable little town Saffron Walden, with its museum and its group of clever men, a very interesting account is given. The Exhibition of 1851 is recalled; and Richardson tells us that its effect—and we may add that of the development of the railways—on the health of women, and consequently on the doctor's income, was one of its unexpected results: women whose lives had been spent in valetudinarianism rose from their sofas, and in the second half of the century forgot that the daily or weekly visits of the doctor had for generations been the principal event in the lives of themselves and such as they. To cycling as a means of health the author gives the same credit. Among other interesting facts he tells us also that he frequently attended in the camps of the gypsies, and found that this nomad way of life was far from a healthy one for the children of these folk In this and innumerable other departments of his life's work the author cannot prevent our perceiving that his devotion to the sick and sorrowful was at least as exemplary as that of those others of the noble band of genera practitioners to whose ranks he then belonged, and whose self-denying labours he has so admirably recorded.

Even in the scientific investigations, which more and more occupied his maturer life, love of man and an earnest desire to benefit his race were prominent. Fruitful as such aspirations are, Richardson might perhaps have done more for science if this love of knowledge had been more disinterested. We must not forget that even Pasteur's work was chiefly inspired by the hope of discovering the means of benefiting his fellow men, yet Richardson was not perhaps wholly free from some tinge of that Philistinism which too often colours the ideas of the benevolent man.

Perhaps Richardson's best work was that on the anæsthetic agents, and on the methods of anæsthesia, whether general or local. In the same spirit he sought a remedy for the terrible effects of clotting of the blood in the heart, or blood-vessels; and certainly the cases quoted by him in support of the method he advised, must command attention. In the sphere of antiseptic surgery, also, he worked hard at a time when its principles were so little understood that the author himself, neither then nor afterwards, was able to lay hold of the principles of bacteriology, on which study he makes adverse and belated reflections. We were unaware that while working at the ethers Richardson had recommended nitrite of

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amyl in angina pectoris, a therapeutic discovery which has been attributed to others.

The enthusiasm for humanity which dictated so many of these researches, led Richardson to the front of the battle in the causes of preventive medicine and of teetotalism. His splendid services in the field of sanitary reform are too well known to need record in these columns; his determined advocacy of total abstinence, no doubt, as he tells us, to his own pecuniary detriment, sprang again from his ardent humanity. Whether, right or wrong, he was as a lion in his aweless championship of all measures which, in his opinion concerned the well-being of the masses. At the same time, his report of the social ignominy which overtook those who advocated this unpopular cause, seems to us exaggerated. Higginbottom, of Nottingham, may, of course, have strode down the room at the Provincial Medical Association unregarded and even shunned of men; but the present writer well remembers the honour in which Higginbottom was held by his contemporaries in spite of his determined opposition to the use of alcohol; and the writer, who also enjoyed the friendship of other prominent teetotallers, such as Edward Baines, never heard worse words spoken against these blameless men than that they were the victims of a troublesome whim. In practice the public not unnaturally fight shy of a faddist, as they supposed the teetotaller to be; but, except in the society of topers, surely no teetotaller as such was ever shunned. Sir Benjamin's nephelococcygian dream of the ideal City of Health made a great effect upon the audience to whom the address was given. The earnest purpose and the fervent desire of the orator to benefit mankind gave a reality to a scheme which, of course, he put forward more or less as a phantasy.

In dwelling on the life of Sir Benjamin Richardson we are led to wonder how it was that a man so earnest, so able, so fertile in speculation, so ardent in his laboratory researches should have achieved comparatively little of permanent scientific value. On the other hand, we shall not forget that much of his energy was given to inspiring and directing the men of his time in social work which, if it cannot be formulated, was none the less permanent in its effects. We have hinted that the speculative part of the volume before us is less interesting than the narrative: the thoughts are turned out upon paper in a crude state, and, generally speaking, are no more than the floating thoughts of any able and thoughtful man. Nay, we cannot but feel that in their form we observe the ill effects of the very apprenticeship that he believed to be the best early education for a medical man. We believe that a more systematic training in scientific method in his earlier days would have led not only to a chastening of such speculations, but also to the attainment of scientific discoveries of a more abiding value. Nevertheless, we put down this book with a sense that men of Richardson's stamp—courageous and unwearied in the pursuit of truth—are the salt of our race; and that even in the most unsubstantial of his musings there is always an elevation of tone which reveals the noble and humane character of one so long a familiar figure among us, but whose voice we shall hear no more. T. C. A.

A NEW WORK ON POPULAR ASTRONOMY.

The Concise Knowledge Astronomy. By Agnes M. Clerke, A. Fowler, A.R.C.S., F.R.A.S., Demonstrator to the Royal College of Science; and J. Ellard Gore, F.R.A.S., M.R.I.A. With illustrations from photographs and drawings. Pp. x + 581. (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1898.)

THIS is a formidable array of authors, and the necessity for such a numerous combination is not at all clear. There is nothing in the book that any one of the three could not have written, and we might add that any one of the three could have written a better book, than the united efforts of the three have produced. While the separate parts, judged from a popular standpoint, are in many respects admirable, there is a want of cohesion in the whole, that is disappointing and unsatisfactory. Collaboration to be effective must be close and thorough; but here, facts are repeated by the separate authors in a way which annoys, and statements are divided between the different writers in a manner which disturbs, a reader. Efficient editing could have prevented a good deal of this overlapping, and have dovetailed the parts together with more skill; but the cumbrous machinery that necessitated an editor at all was a mistake. Can any one suppose that there is any material gain in taking the chapters on the sidereal universe out of Miss Clerke's hands and placing them in those of Mr. Gore, or that Mr. Fowler was incapable of describing the main features of the several members of the solar system? Judging from the result before us, an elementary book is not increased in accuracy nor benefited in arrangement by distributing the compilation among several authors.

Of the trinity here under consideration, Miss Clerke is the largest contributor. To her is entrusted the opening chapters, sketching the history of the science from Hipparchus to the present time. In her hands, a sketch, however brief, is sure to be well arranged and graphically written. We confess, however, to a little disappointment that more space is not given to the development of spectroscopy, and this remark applies not only here but throughout the book generally. Owing to considerations of space it might have been necessary to curtail, or even to exclude, all reference to Mohammedan, and possibly to pre-Newtonian science in these opening chapters; but this loss would have been more than compensated by impressing on the average reader the importance of astrophysics and the part it plays, and in the immediate future, will play, in the development of astronomical science. It must be, no doubt, always a difficult task to know what facts are to be suppressed, and to what others prominence must be given, in order to preserve in due perspective the salient features that mark the onward progress of a science. But full advantage has not been taken of the marvellously rapid development of astrophysics to make it an incentive to the study of astronomy. The facts, and possibly the speculations, of spectroscopy have a great fascination for the general reader. The results can be presented without reference to mathematical formulæ, and by the powerful appeal they make to the imagination, they are eminently calculated to excite public enthusiasm and arouse an intelligent

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